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Misconceptions Among Us: Evaluating Informal Karst Education in the United States and Abroad

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Misconceptions Among Us: Evaluating Informal Karst Education in the United States and Abroad

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Abstract

Data collected through archival research, personal communication, electronic surveys, and field-based research at four US show caves, including Mammoth Cave, indicate the existence of multiple misconceptions about education in informal learning settings. For instance, although karst educational endeavors are seemingly abundant, the number of these programs directed at children far outnumbers the quantity of programs available to adult learners. Moreover, over 54% of educational pursuits focus solely on caves, not karst terrains. Operators of many tourism facilities lack an understanding of learning outcomes from guided tour experiences or an understanding of how best to develop cave tours. Data also reveal abundant disconnects between visitor desires for education and tour guide and manager opinions about the subject. This body of data is alarming in that it reveals managers and educators may be misinformed about educational pursuits at karst attractions, and alternative techniques to enhance educational endeavors can make a difference.